

# Reframing and Extending Tradition

## Intangible Cultural Heritage and Public Folklore in Newfoundland and Labrador

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Efforts to preserve intangible cultural heritage (ICH) within a community context face many challenges. Much of this traditional knowledge and local folklore continues to be shared within communities at a very informal level, passed on by word of mouth, and by example. It carries with it a great deal of practical information, as well as more abstract concepts of history, heritage and identity. It also presents numerous challenges in terms of how we safeguard these traditions.

In order to make safeguarding programmes and other participatory heritage processes work and succeed, communities often require some type of guidance, facilitation or collaboration. As elements of ICH, and communities themselves, shift and evolve, the role and approaches of mediators must adapt and shift to fit local circumstances and situations. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the provincial ICH strategy is promoted and put into action by the ICH office of the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador (HFNL) and its partners. Many of the individuals engaged at this level are trained folklorists.

Below are presented three approaches where ICH safeguarding strategies in Newfoundland and Labrador utilize guided facilitation by professional folklorists: community-based training initiatives; safeguarding ICH within heritage districts; and, the development of public programs as part of folklife festivals.

### Newfoundland and Labrador: The Context

Newfoundland and Labrador is the easternmost province of Canada. Situated in the country's Atlantic region, it incorporates the island of Newfoundland and mainland Labrador to the northwest. It has a combined area of 405,212 square kilometres, with a population of just over 514,000. Most of the population is concentrated on the eastern portion of the island of Newfoundland.

It is a province with a rich intangible cultural heritage, with both native aboriginal populations, and a settler population of predominantly English and Irish ancestry. The island of Newfoundland has a long history associated with the North Atlantic cod fishery, and much of its local culture and flavour evolved in small fishing villages scattered along the island's long coastline.

Linguistic, cultural and social traditions persisted in many small isolated communities after they had faded or changed in the European communities where they were born.

By 1992, once-plentiful codfish stocks had dwindled to near extinction. Fearing they would disappear entirely if the fisheries remained open, the federal government of the day instituted a moratorium on northern cod stocks. The moratorium abruptly ended a way of life that had endured for generations in many rural communities, leading to a decline of rural settlements throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

In the fishing community of Keels, as one example, the population dropped from around 200 people in 1982 to close to 50 by 2012. An observer in that community notes that “residents have gradually moved away to seek work in places like Alberta, and the landscape of Keels has dramatically changed. Many buildings have been abandoned, some torn down, and a number of houses have been bought up by summer residents from Ontario or the United States”<sup>1</sup> – a post-moratorium story repeated over and over throughout much of the province.

Out-migration and unemployment impacted not only the physical landscape, but also the intangible cultural heritage tied to the fishery, and the pattern of life in small rural communities. The resulting movement of young people to urban areas or out of the province meant that cultural traditions were not being transmitted from generation to generation in the same way, or to the extent to which they had once been passed down.

## **Background on ICH Policy in Newfoundland and Labrador**

In 2002, Dr. Gerald Pocius of Memorial University of Newfoundland’s Department of Folklore represented Canada at a meeting of experts in Rio de Janeiro working on an early draft of UNESCO’s Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage. Twenty specialists from around the world debated a number of key issues that the Convention hoped to address. Pocius writes: “I returned to Newfoundland that January inspired and enthusiastic, convinced that UNESCO’s work in this field was of immense importance to our province and our culture. I was optimistic that the Government of Canada would support UNESCO’s work, and soon I became involved in ICH policy discussions in Ottawa, working with the Department of Canadian Heritage. I was naturally disappointed when the Canadian government decided not to sign on to the final version of the Convention that was ratified in 2003. However, a number of us had begun work here in our province on ICH, believing that we could pursue many of the UNESCO policies here even though our federal government was not a signatory of the Convention.”<sup>2</sup>

1 G. Pocius, “The 2012 Keels Field School”, in: G. Pocius (ed.), *Living Spaces: The Architecture of the Family Fishery in Keels, Newfoundland*. St. John’s, 2013, p. 2-4.

2 G. Pocius. “A Review of ICH in Newfoundland & Labrador”, *Intangible Cultural Heritage Update* 16, 2010, p. 1-2.

In 2006, the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador released its Provincial Cultural Strategy, *Creative Newfoundland and Labrador*. It outlined the need for a strategy to safeguard intangible cultural heritage and recommended to “over the longer term, create a public advisory committee with responsibility for the recognition and designation of provincial intangible cultural heritage.”<sup>3</sup>

Pocius, who remains one of the driving figures in the development of ICH policy in Newfoundland and Labrador, notes: “There is no doubt that over the years, the local heritage community has embraced ICH as a concept because it felt a sense of urgency in a time of extreme change. With the collapse of the cod fishery, Government and NGOs all realized that rural communities no longer would be places tied to the resources of water and land, populated by families related by kinship, often there for generations. Rather, outposts were becoming gentrified summer enclaves, filled with outsiders who came for a month or two, to engage briefly in what they saw as some authentic culture. The fishing had stopped, locals were leaving, and ironically the tourism industry that was going to be the salvation of rural Newfoundland was now bringing in people with money to buy up communities, especially highly coveted “waterfront property.” Policies and programs needed to be put in place to encourage the living traditions of the province to continue. In this time of cultural uncertainty, ICH focused on the ongoing traditions central to provincial identity.”<sup>4</sup>

Starting in 2008, HFNL established its ICH office. I shifted from my work with the foundation’s built heritage office into my new role as Intangible Cultural Heritage Development Officer, at that point, the first full-time provincial ICH officer in Canada. A large part of my role was, and is, to enact the province’s ICH Strategy. Written between 2006 and 2008, and adopted formally by HFNL in 2008, the overall vision of the strategy is to ensure that intangible cultural heritage is safeguarded as both a living heritage and as a source of contemporary creativity.

The strategy has four goals: documentation, the work of inventorying; celebration, where we honour our tradition-bearers; transmission, where we ensure that skills are passed from person to person, generation to generation, and community to community; and, cultural industry, where we build stronger communities using intangible cultural heritage as a tool.<sup>5</sup>

In many ways, the job title under which I labour, “development officer,” has influenced our approach to the implementation of the strategy. Since 2008, HFNL’s work on ICH has attempted to be proactive. And, since Canada is not a signatory to the 2003 UNESCO Convention, we have been able to focus on the work of developing best practices for safeguarding, without being consumed by work on representative lists.

3 Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. *Creative Newfoundland and Labrador: The Blueprint for Development and Investment in Culture*. St. John’s, 2006.

4 G. Pocius. “The Emergence of Cultural Heritage Policy in Newfoundland and Labrador”, *Newfoundland Quarterly* 103:11, 2010, p. 43-45.

5 Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador, *What Is Intangible Cultural Heritage?* St. John’s, 2008.

Given the background of both Dr. Pocius and myself as folklorists, much of the discourse around intangible cultural heritage in Newfoundland and Labrador has been through the lens of North American folklore scholarship. Several key people involved with local and provincial museums, training programs, and festivals are faculty members or graduates of Memorial University's Department of Folklore. My own work, in particular, has been influenced by my background in vernacular architecture studies, heritage conservation, heritage activism, cultural conservation, oral history, and public folklore.

The terms "cultural mediator" or "cultural broker" are rarely, if ever, used in the context of public folklore work undertaken in the province. Instead, those active in the field consider themselves folklorists, facilitators, curators, or collaborators with community organizations.

In many ways, however, the praxis which has emerged in Newfoundland and Labrador for cultural conservation and public folklore revolves around the work of cultural mediators and brokers. In these systems, folklorists work with and for the community under study, towards some kind of publicly-beneficial goal.

In their introduction to the classic text, *Public Folklore*, editors Robert Baron and Nicholas Spitzer define public folklore as "the representation and application of folk traditions in new contours and contexts within and beyond the communities in which they originated, often through the collaborative efforts of tradition bearers and folklorists or other cultural specialists."<sup>6</sup> Acts of public folklore, they argue, involve folklorists "purposefully reframing and extending tradition in collaboration with folk artists, native scholars, and other community members."<sup>7</sup> This idea of "purposefully reframing and extending tradition" provides a conceptual model around which we can place HFNL's four-part practical strategy of inventorying, celebration, transmission and cultural industry.

## Community Training Initiatives

In the fall of 2008, HFNL completed a provincial needs assessment<sup>8</sup>, to measure the level of awareness of ICH issues at the community level, and to pinpoint key areas where assistance was needed.

Many of the respondents to the survey (primarily community museums, historic sites, and local heritage organizations) felt that they had a basic understanding of ICH. This level of understanding is most likely due to the hosting of a province-wide ICH Forum held in St. John's, the capital city of the province, in 2006. This forum brought together a large number of community representatives, government officials, academics and ICH practitioners.

6 R. Baron & N. Spitzer, 'Introduction', in: R. Baron & N. Spitzer (eds.), *Public Folklore*. Washington, 1992, p. 3.

7 R. Baron & N. Spitzer, *Introduction*, p. 3.

8 B. Gravinese, *Provincial ICH Online and Phone Training Needs Assessment Report*. St. John's, 2008.



1. Workshop on digital audio recording for ethnography and oral history, St. John's (Photo by Dale Jarvis)

Almost three-quarters of those surveyed in 2008 stated their organization or community was undertaking an ICH project of some kind. More than half of the respondents stated they would be undertaking an ICH project within the year which would most likely involve documenting or celebrating local traditional knowledge, skills, cultural practices, or tradition-bearers. In terms of needed resources, almost all respondents expressed an interest in ICH training in standards and practices for recording and documenting their community's ICH. An enthusiastic 94% said they and/or their organization would be interested in receiving additional information about safeguarding ICH.

Two things became abundantly clear following the establishment of the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador's ICH office in 2008, and the completion of the provincial needs survey. The first was that local communities were interested and eager to begin the work of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage at the community level. The second was that they had very little knowledge or expertise on where to start.

In response, HFNL developed a variety of training programs and community-based workshops. These were created not only to introduce the concept of ICH to community members but also to provide practical training.

Training workshops fall roughly into two categories: training in ethnographic documentation and ICH safeguarding; and training in traditional skills and crafts. In the first category, HFNL has developed a number of workshops on cultural documentation and safeguarding, including: technical workshops on audio recording; interviewing techniques; oral history; folklore

festival planning; Google mapping; and cemetery restoration. In the second category, HFNL has offered or partnered on workshops related to: traditional square dancing; hobby horse making; instrument making; rug hooking; traditional weaving; and ethnic cooking.

The goal of these training activities is to raise the level of awareness in communities about intangible cultural heritage, the methods to document it, how to celebrate it, and in some instances, to help pass along tradition. HFNL matches people who have skills with people who need them. It facilitates the transmission of knowledge and expertise, oftentimes linking people who might not meet in the course of daily life, and directs attention to little-known or little-documented traditions or skills.

Training, on its own, is a limited form of brokerage. In the early years of developing ICH workshops, HFNL used a “shotgun” approach to training – travelling around the province and offering introductory workshops in central locations. It got the word out about intangible cultural heritage, but returned very little tangible results. In most cases, there was little to no follow-up from communities where the training courses were held.

In response to this, where time and financial resources allow, HFNL now uses what we term a “project-based training” model.<sup>9</sup> In this type of training, HFNL works alongside a community group from start to finish as they develop and implement an ICH documentation/celebration project. HFNL staff walks the community through the process of planning and implementing their project, providing project specific training and community-based workshops throughout the duration of the project. These workshops and training opportunities break down into three rough phases. These phases may overlap depending on the project: project focus and community plan; documentation/archiving of material; and public presentation.

A training model that features repeated visits by an ICH development officer in the role of cultural animator helps build local expertise. It also encourages the completion of a manageable ICH documentation project that is accessible to the general public. While it is not the only approach available to cultural workers, project-based training is one tool that allows us to teach valuable ICH documentation skills while supporting the transmission and celebration of traditional knowledge at the local level.

Dr. Jillian Gould is an Assistant Professor within Memorial University’s Department of Folklore, whose research interests include public folklore, ethnography, and fieldwork. She currently teaches the graduate-level course on public folklore in the department, and was formerly the Education Coordinator at the Eldridge Street Project (now Museum at Eldridge Street) in New York City.

Since 2011, Gould has been partnering with HFNL to deliver a type of project-based training as a component of the graduate public sector folklore course. Typically, graduate students organize some kind of public folklore event or workshop, a model which engages the public while teaching the students

9 D. Jarvis, *Project-Based Training Initiatives: A Model for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Occasional Paper on Intangible Cultural Heritage No. 001. St. John’s, 2013.





2. Bonfire Night in Carbonear, Newfoundland, 5<sup>th</sup> of November, 2010 (Photo by Dale Jarvis)

practical and varied skills in facilitation, group work, community outreach, and project planning. Gould notes: “We wear so many hats; we are not just one thing. Doing my fieldwork in a retirement residence, I was a researcher, I was a friend, I was a granddaughter. I took on all these different roles. I wouldn’t call myself a mediator, or a broker. I prefer ‘collaborator’ or ‘facilitator’.”<sup>10</sup>

In 2011, Gould’s graduate students created a three-part event celebrating Bonfire Night, a local calendar custom which traditionally takes place on the evening of November 5<sup>th</sup>, Guy Fawke’s Night. Working with HFNL, students compiled an online inventory of community-sponsored Bonfire Night events, organized a variety concert with a Bonfire Night theme, and curated an on-stage oral history interview with tradition bearers at a local museum.

The on-stage interview is a common technique used by folklorists to showcase and celebrate local knowledge, and one of the tools for community facilitation that Gould teaches her students: “For me it is what folklore is all about. Our job is to identify traditional culture or tradition bearers, but it is not our job to be the experts. The staged oral history interviews give real experts an opportunity to share their skills and knowledge with their peers. I think it is great to have what are considered ordinary people, who have very special skills or experiences, telling their stories. I love that. It is unexpected, and a way people can engage and learn from each other at a very local and unpretentious level.

10 J. Gould. Personal communication (23-01-2014).

People in the audience stayed around after, they had questions, they were talking to each other. Even though people came from different communities, there were a lot of people who had experiences with Bonfire Night. The people interviewed were of different ages: there was a young guy in his early twenties, and then some who were older, in their fifties and sixties. I remember hearing some people saying “what is he going to know about Bonfire Night?” but he talked about his own experiences. Some of the older people in the audience thought of it as something of their childhood, but didn’t realize that it was something that young kids were still doing. It touched a nerve.”<sup>11</sup>

Gould uses the metaphor of “building bridges” to describe her work. In many ways, that is a good way to explain the work of folklorists in Newfoundland and Labrador engaged in safeguarding strategies: making links in and between communities, and providing training opportunities to those communities so they can act as good stewards of their own heritage.

## **ICH in Heritage Districts**

Following a trend in heritage preservation work in other parts of North America in the 1980s, HFNL started to develop a program for the designation and conservation of registered heritage districts. In the past, when HFNL designated either an individual building or a provincial heritage district, the foundation put up a plaque noting the architectural and historical importance of the site. Sometimes grants were given to buildings or districts. There were some projects to document and share information related to architectural history. But for the most part, once designation was complete, little interaction took place between officials and property owners, or between building residents and the wider community.

Following the creation of the ICH office, the heritage districts program has undergone a major shift, and we are rethinking our relationship with townscapes and the people who live in them. Our strategy for heritage districts has transformed into something much more fluid, more organic, and more responsive to the needs and desires of the people who live in and administrate the district.

Folklorist Lisa Wilson is the Heritage Outreach Officer charged with overseeing and facilitating work in heritage districts for HFNL, and the person responsible for incorporating intangible cultural heritage into the traditionally built-heritage focused program: “There has been a major shift in communicating exclusively with organizations who are involved with heritage, and shifting that communication to the people in the community, and those people who live within these heritage districts – the people who live in the buildings, the people who are from there, people who might not live there anymore but who grew up there and have memories of being there – the people who find meaning in these places rather than organizations or town councils exclusively.”<sup>12</sup>

11 J. Gould. Personal communication (23-01-2014).

12 L. Wilson. Personal communication (22-01-2014).



In a sense, our approach with districts is similar to our work with the project-based training model. We conduct field research, assess local needs, and develop public programs around those needs.

While Wilson herself is a broker, she is often an outsider in the communities where she is undertaking work and research. As such, she relies on a secondary set of brokers at the local level who can provide organizational information and make important preliminary introductions to tradition bearers. She notes: “You need a liaison, someone within the community who can help you make proper connections. If I have a recognizable name, they can trust you and trust your motives, if you have that community connection. When I called the Mizzen Square Dancers today, as an example, I said ‘I got your number from Alice Cumby.’ Everyone knows Alice in the community, and that opened up the conversation. That is where they started listening to this unknown voice on the other end. You have to form these relationships slowly, and not expect it to be perfect every time. Once you do make contact with people, it is important to check back in with them, too.”<sup>13</sup>

In one district, located within the community of Heart’s Content, Wilson conducted hours of oral history research, photography, and geospatial memory mapping with residents. The end product was a booklet of local stories launched as part of a district plaque unveiling.<sup>14</sup> In addition, Wilson curated an online story map, as well as compiling a set of grassroots recommendations and observations about what the community wished to see happen in the district.

The manner in which the recommendations were prepared is a good example of how HFNL works as a cultural facilitator. Following Wilson’s ethnographic fieldwork, nine statements were pulled from recorded oral history interviews. These were selected as recurring themes of how the residents of the district think about heritage in their community. A heritage district “town meeting” was facilitated by HFNL staff in a historic meeting hall in the district. The nine statements gleaned from the oral history research were printed, enlarged, and placed on the walls around the meeting.

Participants were given pens and allocated four “votes” each. They were asked to walk around the hall and make four check-marks on what they thought were the most important topics to them. They were given the opportunity to wander and talk with their neighbours as they read the nine statements, and marked their four top choices. Those recommendations were ranked in order of most important to least important, as voted on by the community. The top three were overwhelmingly more significant than the others in terms of the number of votes cast, a good indication that the themes covered resonated with the majority of participants. From this a final report was compiled for the local heritage organization and town council.

This approach required various levels of mediation: community liaisons helped identify informants; oral histories were collected; recordings were

13 L. Wilson. Personal communication (22-01/2014).

14 L. Wilson (ed.), *So Many Stories, So Many Traditions*. St. John’s, 2013.

analyzed; emergent themes identified; the voting process facilitated; and the final report edited.

“Genuine conservation depends first of all on understanding what you want to conserve,” notes Dale Rosengarten. “Second, it requires coordinating diverse groups and individuals, whose interests are not always in accord.”<sup>15</sup> This process of negotiation is an important part of Wilson’s work in heritage districts, and with ICH safeguarding strategies in general. Public folklorist Jim Griffith notes: “Many public folklorists find themselves continuously negotiating – with their employers, with potential project sponsors, with various kinds of special-interest organizations, with the communities and artists with whom they work. Frequently the public folklorist has aims that differ from those of many individuals within the agency in which he or she works. Even presenting the work of a folk artist to the public frequently involves negotiation.”<sup>16</sup>

Another ICH-rich heritage district is Cable Avenue in Bay Roberts, a street planned and built by the Western Union Telegraph Company. A similar research methodology was utilized, involving intensive interviewing with past and former residents of the district. What the community wanted in Bay Roberts was different from what the community had wanted in Heart’s Content. Instead of a booklet, HFNL curated a small exhibit at the local museum incorporating artefacts loaned from residents and audio clips from oral histories. HFNL also hosted a 100<sup>th</sup> birthday party for the Avenue in partnership with the town and local historical societies, complete with a birthday cake for the street, cut by one of the oldest residents.

HFNL’s role on the Avenue was that of researcher, facilitator, and community organizer. Projects were determined in consultation with the community, developed with community involvement, and presented back to the community for viewing and participation.

In both instances, collected ethnographic materials were made available online through Memorial University’s Digital Archives Initiative, YouTube, and Google maps: online information which community members then shared and re-shared through email and social media. HFNL took the role of facilitator and online curator, collecting and presenting community information back to the community for their own use.

Work in different heritage districts, or work on different projects within the same district, requires different types of mediation, along with a set of skills typical to the trained folklorist, as Wilson notes: “The role varies from community to community, and it has to. It has to be flexible. If I had a very strict idea of my role, I feel like I’d be disappointed, because it changes all the time. On some level, in working with heritage groups, I become a facilitator. That is what they look to me for. But when I’m talking to residents, I’m there usually collecting their stories and opinions, my role is so much different.

15 D. Rosengarten, “Sweetgrass is Gold: Natural Resources, Conservation Policy, and African-American Basketry”, in: M. Hufford (ed.), *Conserving Culture*. Urbana, 1994, p. 152-163.

16 J. Griffith, “Feet on the Ground, Head in the Clouds: Some Thoughts on the Training of Public Folklorists”, in: Baron & N. Spitzer (eds.), *Public Folklore*, p. 231-242.

I'm almost there as a friend, an ally or as someone who can give their stories meaning.

A lot of communities could do it themselves if they had the right communication avenues open, or the ability to focus on issues together. But because there are so many relationships within those communities that could be troubled or political, we can be a neutral force that helps the community work in a different way.

Folklorists are trained to be open to hearing different sides and not putting value judgements on things. We can put value judgements on things, privately, but I think we are trained to strip that away. We just aid them in improving what they are doing. We also have technical abilities that the communities might not, such as collecting oral histories and doing documentation, and helping them find out what they think is important. Sometimes they don't even realize what they find important until they have someone guiding them towards heritage issues or the intangible cultural heritage they have taken for granted. We can help them see value in it."<sup>17</sup>

Helping communities see the value of their everyday intangible cultural heritage is a crucial part of safeguarding local traditions and knowledge. "Because folklorists really do see the world differently from most people," argues folklorist Millie Rahn, "a major part of our work involves helping people recognize and use the richness and variety of their past as a basis for building a stronger future."<sup>18</sup>

While each HFNL project differs, the methodology is similar across the board, and is applicable to all ICH projects: (1) assessment of local needs or ICH under risk; (2) ethnographic research; (3) an interactive final project that encourages deep transmission; and, where possible, (4) documentation of the process.

Shalom Staub notes that the field of cultural conservation "has offered promising opportunities to reknit the tangible and intangible elements of cultural heritage, elements that for too long have been torn apart by academic models and bureaucratic structures,"<sup>19</sup> and that it can foster "creative interaction for the encouragement of folklife."<sup>20</sup> The ICH-based paradigm for heritage districts attempts to achieve the same thing: to bring together physical spaces and places with the stories and traditions of people living in and alongside them. The role of the mediator in the process is to help build bridges of understanding within the community, and show that spaces are more than just collections of historically significant pieces of architecture.

17 L. Wilson. Personal communication (22-01-2014).

18 M. Rahn, "Laying a Place at the Table: Creating Public Foodways Models from Scratch", *Journal of American Folklore* 119:471, 2006, p. 30-46.

19 S. Staub, "Cultural Conservation and Economic Recovery Planning: The Pennsylvania Heritage Parks Program", in: M. Hufford (ed.), *Conserving Culture: A New Discourse on Heritage*. Urbana, 1994, p. 229-244.

20 Staub, *Cultural*, p. 240.



3. Betty White posing with traditional “hooked” mats, Heart’s Content, Newfoundland (Photo courtesy Mel Squarey/Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador)

## Folklife and Festival

Folklorist Ryan Davis is one of the founding members and current executive director of the annual Mummers Festival, based in St. John’s. The Mummers Festival focuses on a popular Christmastime disguise tradition. Originally established as the theme for HFNL’s first annual folklife festival in 2009, the event has spun off into an annual festival of its own, with its own board of directors and mandate.

The festival is a community-based folklife festival which encourages the celebration and free expression of tradition. Throughout December, the Festival hosts a series of events and workshops culminating in the participatory Mummers Parade. Unlike other spectator events, or music and performance-based festivals, the Mummers Festival welcomes the public as participants and not just as observers, empowering people to take ownership of local arts, performance traditions, and calendar customs.

In many ways, Davis fulfills the role of cultural mediator, working with tradition bearers and finding new ways to invigorate a tradition that was considered by some to be under threat. He works, through the festival setting, to reframe and extend that tradition: "We can find out about how traditions are actually experienced and used today by speaking with tradition-bearers and community members," writes Davis. "But also, we can consult with them as we try to figure out new ways of presenting a tradition. We should ask them if they like our ideas for presentation formats, how we could improve on our ideas, and if there are better and more beneficial ways to showcase traditions."<sup>21</sup>

Davis is responsible for selecting artists and tradition bearers to showcase, and planning the way in which those individuals interact with the public through presentations, workshops, and performances. It is a process familiar to many public folklorists. As one American public folklorist notes, "I find it important to act as a mediator between audience and performers to be sure that I have done all I possibly can to ensure a respectful, intelligent, and appreciative response to the artists whom I have invited on stage."<sup>22</sup>

The folklife festival model Davis uses in the organization of the Mummers Festival provides one way at looking at how a broker works to safeguard a specific tradition or set of linked traditions. The festival works well because it assists the communities in fostering situations in which traditions can thrive. "Preserving and safeguarding culture does not suggest the protection of traditions from outside forces, but rather, supports the conditions necessary for cultural reproduction," writes Davis.<sup>23</sup>

Here, Davis elaborates on how he perceives his own role: "I think the number one job is to create a time and space for people to explore the tradition, and to include as many people as you can in that process, be it different tradition bearers, who all have their own understanding of the tradition, or people who have never done it before. I don't think it is two groups, necessarily, I think you are trying to create a space for... I don't know if dialogue is the right word, but some sort of interchange between people, because it isn't necessarily spoken. There is a sharing of understanding of this tradition, because the tradition is very diverse. In a lot of ways, it seems like it is just one thing, but because it is done so differently in different places, bringing all that into one place and seeing what happens is important. As a cultural broker, one should not try to dictate how things go, too much, just giving the right amount of structure that

21 R. Davis, *Festivals and Folklife: Project Planning for Cultural Festivals*. St. John's, 2010.

22 Griffith, *Feet on the Ground*, p. 237.

23 Davis, *Festivals*, p. 4.





4. Parade participants at the first Mummers Festival in St. John's (Photo courtesy Mark Bennett/Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador)

allows for people to feel that they are free to explore, to express, without feeling restricted in any way.”<sup>24</sup>

Robert Cantwell, writing about the planning of the Festival of American Folklife, describes many of the processes involved in phraseology related to the art of magic, referring both to the sense of transport that visitors may experience, and in the sense of conjuring up, creating, or manipulating a temporary sense of place or community.<sup>25</sup> It is an idea that Davis, perhaps unconsciously, echoes in his thoughts about the Mummers Festival: “I knew the potential of gathering people together in disguise. I know it can be riotous as well, but I was looking for magic, I think, more than anything, that communal energy that goes on. That was what I was hoping for: that if you got enough people together in disguise, and brought them together in one place at one time that something would happen, and it would be spontaneous and unpredictable. I loved the idea that everyone who was in disguise would all of a sudden be one common group, even though they might be diverse in terms of their costume or disguise. But they’d all be mummers for one day, and I liked that idea of taking away all those other things that divide people.”<sup>26</sup>

24 R. Davis. Personal communication (15-01-2014).

25 R. Cantwell, “Conjuring Culture: Ideology and Magic in the Festival of American Folklife”, in: M. Hufford (ed.), *Conserving Culture*, p. 167-183.

26 R. Davis. Personal communication (15-01-2014).



Davis's work approaches something close to what Rahn would call "a subtle method of social activism."<sup>27</sup> The festival becomes more than a reframing of tradition; it is transmuted into a tool for social de-stratification. The festival organizer, as conjurer, temporarily creates a new type of community in which all are equal participants.

The sense of community forged by a folklife festival is not always as ephemeral as that created by the Mummers Parade, and can offer opportunities to create lasting communities or networks of tradition bearers.

In 2012, HFNL organized its annual folklife festival around the theme of "make and break" engines – a type of hardy vintage boat engine used on small fishing boats through the first half of the twentieth century. The engines were simple, with a limited number of parts, making it easy for fishermen to repair them quickly and cheaply while on land or water.<sup>28</sup> Changes in marine technology, boatbuilding styles, and the fishery led to their decline, but a number of enthusiasts continued to maintain, collect, restore, and use the old engines. Many rural people, not necessarily boat owners, had strong memories of the distinctive sound of the engines, a nostalgia-inducing tucka-tucka-tuck, once a common part of the aural landscape.

The festival was organized following HFNL's strategy for ICH safeguarding: ethnographic research was conducted; vintage repair manuals discovered, digitized and shared online; community experts and tradition bearers were mobilized; and a public flotilla of vintage boats with working engines was organized.

Following the public event, a "parts swap" was organized, where boat engine enthusiasts were encouraged to bring pieces and parts for vintage engines to a central location. There, they traded and sold pieces, shared information, and made connections. The coordinator, a graduate student of folklore, wore many hats, working as an ethnographic field worker, project planner, and publicist.

Prior to the festival, most of the enthusiasts had worked in isolation; the festival gave people with a common interest a chance to forge a new, mutually-beneficial community. After the event, the festival coordinator reported: "The smiles... around me on the day of the events came from the sense of belonging, a sense of camaraderie in an endeavor that some of these men may have thought was impossible – bringing new life to these old engines. Many of the men that gathered that day did not know each other, although they may have known of one another. The older generation mixed with the younger and by the end of the day new friendships were born – new friendships that will hopefully last as long as the influence of the make and break engines. There were whispers that day of making the event an annual meet, of engine owners coming together to form an association which would allow them all to keep their engines running and, hopefully, get more back on the water."<sup>29</sup>

27 Rahn, *Laying a Place*, p. 31.

28 J. Carey, "Max Clarke's Make and Break Engines", *Intangible Cultural Heritage Update* 35, 2012, p. 2-3.

29 J. Carey, "Make and Break Festival Review", *Intangible Cultural Heritage Update* 36, 2012, p. 2-3.



5. "Make and Break" engine festival poster, Bonavista. Image courtesy Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador.

One of the community partners in the event was the Wooden Boat Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador, an organization which operates as conservator, exhibitor, and transmitter of the province's knowledge and history of wooden boats, their economic use and contribution to community life. HFNL made its collected ethnographic material and list of informants and participants available to the Boat Museum, who then used that information to organize further boat engine events. Their long-term plan is to include the emerging make and break engine community into future "boats on the water" events, encouraging the transmission of traditional knowledge around boats and boat making.

## Conclusions

Staub notes that the three key elements of cultural conversation are "the emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration, the integration of cultural resources, and the emphasis on community involvement."<sup>30</sup> What is missing from this equation are the facilitators, the agents of change that makes this collaboration, integration, and involvement possible.

In the Newfoundland and Labrador model for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, the role of the broker is central, though it may go by many names. Rahn notes that "public folklore takes the conversations out of the academy and restores them to the community, where they began."<sup>31</sup> The Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador works to do just this, encouraging both conversation about and conservation of what communities feel to be of local importance. The tools we use as public folklorists shift from project to project, and our roles shift within and between projects, but the goal remains the same: to safeguard intangible cultural heritage as part of a living community.

30 Staub, *Cultural*, p. 229.

31 Rahn, *Laying a Place*, p. 31.